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SUBJECT: AVIAN INFLUENZA UPDATE: MOH OFFICIAL PRESENTS GOK  
AI PLAN TO EMBASSY AIWG

REF: REFTEL PREVIOUS REPORTING

¶1. Summary: Embassy Kuwait held its monthly Avian Influenza Working Group (AIWG) meeting on April 29. Members of the U.S. military medical team - from Army Central Command, 386 Air Expeditionary Wing and Office of Military Cooperation - various Embassy section heads and the Embassy medical unit attended the session. The high point was a presentation by the Ministry of Health's Director of Communicable Disease Control Dr. Musaab Al-Saleh concerning the GOK's Pandemic Influenza Plan. This comprehensive presentation highlighted lessons learned from the 2006 Avian Influenza (AI) outbreak and steps taken to coordinate efforts to manage a future outbreak. Dr. Musaab informed the group about Kuwait's vaccine reserves; laboratory, hospital and quarantine capacity; and coordination plan between various GOK ministries to manage essential services during an outbreak. He also highlighted the GOK's coordination with international organizations like the CDC, WHO, and FAO; and cooperation with the GCC. End Summary.

#### Lessons Learned from 2006

¶2. Dr. Musaab admitted that although Kuwait responded quickly and contained the outbreak effectively in 2006, several areas of weakness were identified as a result of the outbreak. More than two million birds were culled during the outbreak in 43 areas of the country. Eleven hundred human cases were investigated but all were found to be negative for AI. Coordination with the Ministry of Interior and Municipality was critical in identifying and culling infected birds and in reducing the smuggling of birds across the border. Some of the lessons learned were that the GOK needs to make a more concerted effort to manage public awareness and panic; needs better coordination among various sectors of government and between the public and private sector; needs more expertise in identifying the source of infection and in evaluating the impact of migratory birds; needs better coordination at the borders to minimize smuggling; need to exchange experiences with other countries; and most importantly, needs to create an adequate compensation evaluation methodology for local farmers.

#### GOK AI Plan

¶3. After the 2006 outbreak, GOK developed its new AI plan with the following objectives: early detection, decrease influenza morbidity and mortality, estimate realistic budget needed, maintain continuity of essential services and minimize social disruptions and economic loss. A comprehensive list of Ministries and private sector entities is included in the plan, including the Ministries of Health, Defense, Information, Interior, Finance, and Commerce and

Industry along with the Environmental Health Agency, Customs Division and Private Healthcare partners. Ports and border control, and early detention and reporting, are the key components of the GOK plan in the pre-outbreak stage.

¶4. As part of its vaccination and medication plan, the GOK has stockpiled more than 10 million doses of antiviral medication, which include Tamiflu and Relenza. In addition, GOK contributes to the GCC project to collect additional 10 million doses of the antiviral medication for poorer countries in the region. GCC offices in Saudi Arabia have collected 2.5 million doses thus far. Dr. Musaab added that the GCC anticipates using this stock to manage an outbreak in Yemen. In addition to the GCC stock, GCC countries are coordinating to negotiate medicine prices and services. He added that Iraq has not been in the calculation in the past, but they hope to include Iraq in the next GCC meeting on Avian Influenza.

¶5. The GOK's plan identifies priority groups for antiviral use such as health care workers, essential services providers, and public safety workers. It also includes a plan for triage and admission, treatment protocols and discharge. As part of its vaccination initiative, GOK has purchased 600,000 vaccines for birds and 100,000 to 600,000 doses of human seasonal flu vaccines based on CDC recommendations. Kuwait is also in negotiations to purchase the new Human H5N1 vaccine. GOK has plans to purchase 2.7 million doses of this new vaccine.

¶6. The GOK's Pandemic Outbreak plan includes the more than three million residents of Kuwait. It does not discriminate between Kuwaiti citizens, which amount to approximately one million people, and foreign nationals. In addition, it

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includes provisions to support Kuwaiti citizens traveling or living abroad. Kuwait has sent guidance to its embassies around the world regarding procedures to manage an outbreak. The GOK has also supplied doses of Tamiflu to its embassies in poorer countries.

#### Coordination with International Organizations

¶7. The GOK is working closely with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to ensure that its plans are compliant with international standards. According to Dr. Musaab, the Kuwait Virology Lab is approved and certified by WHO and MOH refers its lab results to Navy Medical Research Unit - 3 (NAMRU-3) in Cairo and CDC labs in London. MOH is following international guidelines in the areas of specimen collection, laboratory diagnosis, biosafety, surveillance, clinical management, pandemic preparedness and vaccination.

#### Comment

¶8. This presentation, the first of its kind by the MOH for the Embassy, is an important next step in the Embassy's coordination with the GOK, especially the Ministry of Health on Pandemic Outbreak preparedness. This meeting allowed the AIWG the opportunity to get details on various technical aspects of the Kuwaiti plan. More importantly, it opened the door to gaining more access to GOK information through working level contacts. As a next step, Embassy has asked the Ministry of Health for a complete list of POCs for various Ministries and departments involved in the GOK Pandemic Outbreak Plan. This will bolster the Embassy's government contact list for any emergency, not just in the case of an outbreak.

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